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AUTHOR Comas, Robert E.; Day, Robert W.
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ABSTRACT

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Career Exploration for College Students:

A Report on a Program

Robert E. Comas and Robert W. Day

The University of Alabama

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Running Head: Career Exploration for College Students

Abstract

The realization of an acute need to help undergraduate students identify meaningful educational and vocational goals led to the development of Career Exploration at the University of Alabama. The overall purpose of the course was to provide interested students from all schools and colleges a comprehensive, developmental program of self exploration, development of skills of decision-making, exploration of educational and career possibilities, and contact with the world of work. The course format consisted of four major components: information sessions, group counseling sessions, individual appraisal and counseling, and on-the-job field work experiences. Course evaluation indicated that the 86 participants generally agreed that the course had either helped make a career decision or provided skills to assist in making a decision at a later date.

Career Exploration for College Students

Realization of the acute need to help undergraduate students identify meaningful educational and vocational goals led to the development of Career Exploration at the University of Alabama. The course was offered during the 1975 Spring Semester as a result of funding through the Presidential Venture Fund of the University, an internal foundation established to support experimental programs that enhance the quality of teaching and learning at this institution. The course was offered through the New College, an innovative, interdisciplinary program of undergraduate education utilizing a non-traditional, individualized instructional approach. Faculty from Programs in Counseling and Guidance of the Area of Behavioral Studies in the College of Education were responsible for program design and coordination.

Purpose

The overall purpose of the course was to provide interested students from all schools and colleges a comprehensive, developmental program of self exploration, development of skills of decision-making, exploration of educational and career possibilities, and contact with the world of work.

Objectives

Specific course objectives were:

1. To identify a group of undergraduate students who expressed interest in exploring specific educational and vocational possibilities.

2. To provide opportunities for students to become more aware of themselves as personalities in the process of choosing a major area of study and a vocational area of interest.
3. To develop decision-making skills which could be applied both immediately and on a continuing basis, utilizing personal and environmental information in educational and occupational choice.
4. To provide realistic academic and occupational information for the purpose of facilitating appropriate vocational choice and career development.
5. To provide on-the-job field experiences in areas of specific interest.

Strategies

Specific strategies designed to accomplish respective course objectives involved:

1. Advertisement of the course by distribution of circulars at selected campus locations and at registration areas, by publication in campus and community newspapers, by campus and community radio announcements, and by announcement to classes during the preceding semester.
2. Administration and interpretation of a battery of personality and interest inventories, opportunities for personal and group counseling, and individual appraisal and self awareness activities.

3. Small group activities, individual projects, and personal counseling, each emphasizing the acquisition and application of decision-making skills.
4. Interaction with academic and business representatives, individuals on the job, Career Planning and Placement specialists, and other students. Analysis of educational and occupational literature.
5. Observation and participation in work activities in the community or at the University.

Contributors

Representatives from many areas of the University and surrounding community contributed to the course. Participants in planning included personnel from: the New College; the Area of Behavioral Studies of the College of Education; the Office of Career Planning and Placement; the Service Learning Center of the Office of Academic Services, the coordinating agency for experiential learning at the University; the University Counseling Center; and the University administrative staff. Program contributors included: faculty and practicum students of the Counseling and Guidance programs; personnel of the University Testing Service; representatives from each school and college at the University; the director and cooperating agencies of the New Office of Voluntary Action, a clearing house for students participating in University sponsored volunteer programs; personnel of the Office of Career Planning and Placement; counselors at the University Counseling Center; and volunteers

from community businesses, industries, and public service agencies.

Approximately 40 University personnel were involved in planning, implementation, or consultation with the course. Forty-seven representatives of community, private, and governmental organizations served as supervisors, adjunct instructors, or consultants. In addition, about 105 other persons were contacted by students through individual activities.

Participants

The course was announced approximately one month prior to the 1975 Spring Semester registration. Plans were made to include from 30 to 50 students; however, student demand during registration increased the number of participants to 86. Participants included 38 Freshmen, 20 Sophomores, 19 Juniors, eight Seniors, and one Irregular Post Graduate. Forty-one of the students were majoring in Arts and Sciences, 16 in Education, 13 in Communication, nine in Commerce and Business Administration, four in New College, two in Home Economics and one was in Social Work. No Engineering students participated. Fifty-six females and 30 males enrolled. Other students were interested in the course, but adequate facilities and personnel were not available to offer the course to them at the time.

Format

The course format consisted of four major components: large group information sessions, small group counseling sessions, individual appraisal and counseling, and on-the-job field work experiences. Although

initial large group sessions involved some instructional material, the primary emphasis throughout the entire course was on student participation in carefully planned, experientially oriented activities.

Grade Contract

Students who enrolled in Career Exploration registered for three semester credit hours. Since the course emphasized an activity orientation rather than an academic orientation, traditional evaluation techniques of testing and grading of assignments were not utilized. Instead, a highly personalized contract system of grading permitting each student to select appropriate experiences based on individual need and readiness was developed.

Students were allowed to select from two options for grading purposes. Plan I consisted of the pass/fail option available at The University of Alabama. Students selecting this plan completed only the required assignments and met the attendance requirement of the course. Two of the 86 enrollees selected this option.

Plan II was the contract for grade option. It consisted of the following requirements:

A. Work to be completed by all students:

1. Complete questionnaire about reasons for taking this course.
2. Complete all testing planned for the course (test battery administered for self-assessment purposes).

3. Participate in at least one individual counseling session for interpretation and discussion of the results of the test battery.
4. Prepare a vocational autobiographical description based on a career development theory.
5. Complete assignments in A Purpose for Your Life. (5)
6. Complete required sections of Decisions and Outcomes. (3)
7. Complete A Self-Directed Search. (4)
8. Read textbook, Career Planning and Job Hunting, Rosemary Gaymer. (1)
9. Read Occupational Options, Rosemary Gaymer. (2)

B. Attendance Requirements:

1. Plan I - No more than five absences.
2. A Contract - No more than three absences.
3. B Contract - No more than four absences.
4. C Contract - No more than five absences.

C. In addition to fulfilling requirements of sections A and B above, completion of any four of the following assignments for an A, three of the following for a B, and two of the following for a C.

1. Analyze three jobs by the "Analysis of an Occupation Outline."
2. Interview three individuals working in a job area of interest and summarize the interviews following the "Guide for

Conducting an Interview."

3. Prepare a letter of application and a personal resume'.
4. Participate as a job applicant, tape a simulated employment interview in a job area of interest.
5. Attend any three of the four sessions of Women Emerging, a career awareness program for females, February 19 and 20, 1975, and summarize impressions in three to five pages.
6. Complete an approved project in career exploration; for example, volunteer work, additional testing, or observation of an individual in an area of work.

Eighty-four students selected Plan II. Of this number, 81 earned a grade of A, and one earned a grade of B, and two did not complete course requirements and received Incomplete.

From the list of alternative assignments available in Part C of the contract, 72 students completed analyses of occupations, 65 completed interviews with persons in work situations, 70 chose to construct letters of application and resumes, 30 participated in simulated employment interviews, 55, including 12 males, attended the Women Emerging program, and 37 completed approved projects.

Approved projects included personal counseling, IQ testing and interpretation, in-depth study of vocational topics, volunteer work, and aptitude testing utilizing the General Aptitude Test Battery.

Field Work Option

In addition to the above course activities, students were able to

enroll for one additional credit hour for field work experience. This work experience took place in the surrounding community or in an appropriate University facility and involved approximately 30 hours of observation and participation in a work situation closely related to each individual's expressed area of interest. Placements were arranged by the New Office of Voluntary Action, the Office of Career Planning and Placement, or the students themselves, and included the following positions: counselor aide in a juvenile shelter facility, typist and researcher for a legal firm, manager trainee in food service, TV camera operator, recreational assistant at the Park and Recreation Authority, academic tutor at a Community Youth Center, assistant at the University Public Relations Office, arts and crafts instructor for Senior Citizens, assistant at the local office of the Alabama State Employment Service, production assistant for the University of Alabama Yearbook, public relations assistant for the local Chamber of Commerce, research assistant in the Tuscaloosa County Archives Department, research assistant at the University Continuing Education Center, public relations assistant for the University Alumni Office, assistant at a local real estate firm, assistant at the Office of Career Planning and Placement, and assistant at the University Office of Business Services.

Class Activities

All students in the course met once per week for one hour and twenty minute sessions for large group activities. A discussion of the activities for each session follows.

First Meeting/Introduction: An introduction to the objectives and procedures planned for the course was given, demographic data was collected, daily schedules of students were obtained for use in assignment to small groups, and an initial questionnaire to survey reasons for taking the course was administered.

Second Meeting/Testing: Instruments comprising the individual appraisal battery were administered and small group counseling assignments were made. Students who were unable to attend this session were administered the battery on an individual basis prior to the following group meeting. The test battery consisted of the Strong Vocational Interest Blank, the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire, a sentence completion form and an autobiographical data blank.

Third Meeting/Overview of Development of Career Education: A brief description of the historical development of career education was presented, followed by a discussion of the societal and individual needs which have resulted in current emphasis on career education and counseling. Enhancement of the developmental process by various educational and guidance activities was discussed and an orientation was given as to the purposes and processes of self-awareness, self exploration, decision making, and career preparation applicable to this course.

Fourth Meeting/Analysis of Occupation and Contracting: Each of the contract requirements was discussed and contract options were selected. For those students not attending this session or unable to reach contract decisions during the allotted time, contracting was to be completed prior

to the next meeting. The process of analyzing published occupational information following an outline for analysis constructed for this course was explained.

Fifth Meeting/A Look at the Labor Force:

The composition of the labor force, contrasting contemporary structure with that of previous decades, was described. Definition and illustration of employment and unemployment were given.

Sixth Meeting/Vocational Choice: Basic components of the vocational theories of Ginzberg, Holland, Super, and Roe were briefly described and illustrated.

Seventh Meeting/Hall Occupational Orientation Inventory: The group was subdivided into three groups and the Hall Occupational Orientation Inventory administered. Preliminary interpretation of results took place, with individual analysis and discussion to occur in the group counseling sessions the following week.

Eighth Meeting/Vocational Autobiographical Analysis: The group was again divided and the Ginzberg model of career development discussed. A sample autobiography written according to this model was presented and each student wrote a vocational autobiographical description. Individual assistance, as needed, was given in applying the theory.

Ninth Meeting/Relation of Major to Vocational Choice and Trends in Jobs for University of Alabama Graduates: The director of the Office of Career Planning and Placement described the functions of that office

and discussed current employment trends for graduates of this institution. Through a question and answer process, occupations related to major fields of study were described and a projected job outlook given.

Tenth and Eleventh Meetings/Seminars with Academic Representatives: Representatives from each of the schools and colleges at the University held discussions with those students interested in acquiring information concerning majors, entrance and graduation requirements, and vocations for the particular school. Identical sessions were held on two consecutive weeks to permit each student to visit two of the eight colleges at the University.

Twelfth Meeting/Career Planning and Placement: Placement specialists from the Office of Career Planning and Placement presented employment information in each of three placement areas, Careers in Business and Industry, Careers in Government and the Helping Professions, and Careers related to Education. Each student attended the presentation felt to be most appropriate to his or her individual needs.

Thirteenth Meeting/Seminars with Business, Industry, and Public Service Representatives: Each individual met with a community representative working in that student's occupational area of interest. Occupations selected by students and represented at seminars were: accounting, advertising, agriculture, airlines, broadcasting, business, management, engineering, fashion design, home economics, journalism, law, medicine, military, photography, public relations, psychology, real estate, recreation, secretary, social work, speech therapy, and education.

Group Counseling Activities

Students met once per week in a group counseling situation for the same length of time as class meetings. Two counseling and guidance doctoral students served as facilitator for the sessions, each facilitating four groups. The size of groups ranged from eight to 12 members. Group assignments were made non-selectively according to compatibility of daily schedules. Resulting composition was quite heterogenous with regard to sex, class, major, and other readily perceptible factors, creating a highly interactive group atmosphere.

The primary intent of group counseling was exploration of self perceptions in relation to educational and occupational options. Major emphases were value clarification, self assessment, decision-making, and personalization of the career development process. Both original and published exercises were utilized, as well as activities requested or initiated by group members. Groups followed similar, but not identical proceedings.

Selected examples of group activities include dyadic and triadic introductory interaction exercises, relaxation training and fantasy exercises, needs identification and abilities assessment from A Purpose for Your Life, decisions skills exercises from Decisions and Outcomes, and administration and interpretation of The Self Directed Search.

Individual Counseling

Interpretation of the appraisal battery and individual counseling

was provided by the group facilitators and six masters level counseling and guidance practicum students. Each Career Exploration student participated in a one-hour test interpretation and counseling session. Additional personal counseling was available as an approved project at the initiation of the student or in response to counselor invitation. Eighteen students participated in individual counseling on this basis.

Evaluation

Course planning and assessment procedures were utilized throughout the sequence of Career Exploration. An initial planning questionnaire, midterm course evaluation, and end-of-course evaluation were administered.

Response to the initial questionnaire indicated that students entered Career Exploration with the perception that they had not received adequate assistance in career development from either secondary educational institutions or the University of Alabama. In addition, responses suggested that students had entered the course with expectations similar to the established objectives of the course.

Mid-course evaluation indicated that the self exploration aspects of the course were meeting student needs, but some class presentations were not well received. Suggestions to include more practical educational and occupational information resulted in modifications in the course to meet these student requests.

Responding to end-of-course evaluations, students indicated that, generally the course had met the objectives each had identified on the initial planning questionnaire. Most participants agreed that the course

had either helped them make a career decision or provided them with the skills which would assist them in making a decision at a later date. Students identified the self exploration activities as one of the most positive and significant contributions of the course.

Conclusion

Because of the recognized need for facilitation of career development at the college level and because of the positive reactions of students to this course, the recommendation was made that Career Exploration be continued as an integral part of the undergraduate curriculum at the University of Alabama. As a result the course has been continued as part of a university-wide unified career development program.

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